



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

REGION 4  
ATLANTA FEDERAL CENTER  
61 FORSYTH STREET  
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30303-8960

January 13, 2014

U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Railroad Administration  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.,  
Room W38-311  
Washington, DC 20590  
Attn: Mr. John Winkle

**Subject:** EPA Comments on the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)  
for the Tupelo Railroad Relocation Planning and Environmental Study  
City of Tupelo, Lee County, Mississippi  
CEQ No. 20130356

Dear Mr. Winkle:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 4, participated in an interagency scoping meeting on August 14, 2006 and agreed to act as a cooperating agency on August 25, 2006 and provided scoping and draft EIS comments on August 29, 2006 and September 20, 2011, respectively. Consistent with our responsibilities under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act and Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), EPA Region 4 evaluated the consequences of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the Mississippi Department of Transportation's (MDOT) proposed relocation of the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company (BNSF) main rail line through the City of Tupelo, Mississippi. The purpose of the railroad line relocation is to improve mobility and safety by reducing roadway congestion from train traffic moving through the City of Tupelo, specifically at the intersection of Main and Gloster Streets (also known as Crosstown).

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) examines a No-Build Alternative and a Build Alternative. The proposed Build Alternative includes an elevated rail viaduct with a relocated interchange yard (Alternate M). The project is approximately 25 miles long with about 2.8-miles of new elevated track construction and an additional 0.9 miles of new tract for the rail interchange. The main line railroad improvements are primarily located within the existing BNSF right-of-way.

The FEIS indicates that the proposed project will avoid any new crossings of the Natchez Trace Parkway, but may impact up to 350 linear feet of streams (4 perennial stream crossings), 3 303(d) listed stream crossings, 10 acres within the 100-year floodplain, 76 noise sensitive sites (severe), 46 vibration receptors/sites, 37 visual impacts to historic sites or districts, and 1 business relocation. Since the DEIS, no additional reductions in environmental impacts have been documented.

Based on a review of the revised draft Memorandum of Agreement regarding mitigation of impacts to historic resources, EPA supports components of the agreement that include, but are not limited to, the incorporation of landscaping and context sensitive design elements based on input from local residential and local organizations, the construction of pedestrian or multi-use trail along some of the railway right-of-way, as well as, the State Historic Preservation Office and Chickasaw Nation's protocols for ground disturbing activities and archeological discoveries or the discovery of human remains.

EPA notes that the proposed Build Alternative has the least environmental impact of the feasible build alternatives examined during the NEPA process. Nevertheless, we continue to have environmental concerns related to noise and vibration, water resources and visual impacts associated with the elevated rail viaducts. We note that our recommendations will be addressed as follows: 1) additional noise abatement measures will be fully assessed during final design as part of the construction plan, 2) a baseline assessment of wetlands impacts due to "temporary rail line fill and the associated compensation will be addressed through consultation with Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and documented in the Record of Decision (ROD), 3) consultation with MDEQ on best management practices to ensure that the construction of the rail line does not result in any further degradation to impaired water bodies within the project area will be addressed prior to the ROD and the results will be documented in the ROD and 4) a finalized copy of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that describes specific strategies that will be used to mitigate for adverse visual impact will be included with the ROD. EPA requests a copy of the ROD to ensure that the issues above are appropriately addressed.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and look forward to reviewing the ROD for the proposed project. If you have any further questions or concerns, you may contact Ntale Kajumba at (404) 562-9620 or [kajumba.ntale@epa.gov](mailto:kajumba.ntale@epa.gov) and William-Kenneth Dean at (404) 562-9378 or [kenneth.dean@epa.gov](mailto:kenneth.dean@epa.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mueller", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Heinz J. Mueller, Chief  
NEPA Program Office  
Office of Environmental Accountability

cc: Ms. Kim Thurman, Environmental Division Administrator, MDOT